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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001079

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2029
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: PRO-GOVERNMENT GROUPS ATTACK EDUCATION LAW
PROTESTERS

REF: CARACAS 1013

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DARNALL STEUART,
FOR REASON 1.4 (B) & (D).

11. (SBU) Demonstrations for and against the controversial Education Law turned violent August 13. Several hundred educators, university students, and parents marched toward the National Assembly (AN) on August 13 to call for a delay in the vote on the law. About 2000 pro-government demonstrators marched simultaneously, and fighting between the two groups broke out as the demonstrators against the law tried to reach the National Assembly. The Metropolitan Police disbursed the crowd with tear gas. In a separate incident, employees of the government-owned Avila TV station attacked 12 journalists distributing flyers against the Education Law's media-related articles; the attackers called them "defenders of the oligarchy," who should not be on public streets. The Education Law was approved late August 13 (septel), and AN President Cecilia Flores commended the Metropolitan Police for preventing the demonstrations from obstructing the AN's work. She ordered, however, an investigation of the attack against the 12 journalists.

12. (SBU) Following a series of threats to independent media (reftel), the Education Law discussed by the AN August 13 included several media-related articles. One article mandates that all media provide educational programming and that "programming" must be in accordance with the educational and cultural values established in the Constitution, laws and regulations. Another article requires students to be taught to be critical of the media. The journalists attacked, who work for the generally pro-government Cadenas Capriles media company, were protesting a third article which authorizes the immediate closure of media outlets if determined to be necessary by educators.

13. (C) Comment: Scattered protests occurred August 14, and more demonstrations against the approved Education Law are reportedly being planned. Demonstrations are likely to continue when universities and schools re-open. President Chavez has actively campaigned for this Education Law, and pro-government groups will certainly organize supporting rallies if the new law is being challenged.

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